Lincoln National Forest
Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report
Fiscal Year 2000

The purpose of this report is to inform the Forest Leadership Team, other Federal, State, and local agencies, Indian tribes, and the public of the progress the Lincoln National Forest has made toward Forest Plan Implementation and ecosystem management. It is structured to include: key findings and the Forest Supervisor's certification, an overview, monitoring results, and evaluation.

Key Findings and Forest Supervisor's Certification

The Lincoln National Forest was scheduled to begin Plan Revision during fiscal year 1998 and complete it by 2001. However, due to new congressional direction, this schedule was altered and Forest Plan Revision processes were postponed. The new schedule is to begin Forest Plan Revision in 2005.

Since implementation of the Lincoln's Land and Resource Management Plan in 1986, four corrections and nine amendments have been completed, including the Southwestern Region "Final Environmental Impact Statement, For Amendment of Forest Plans", to incorporate Mexican spotted owl and Northern goshawk management direction.

Wildland-urban interface issues gained community attention during the wildfire season of 2000. In particular, Otero County manifested their frustration concerning the issue by sponsoring actions that were to become key points of New Mexico Senate Bill 1. This State legislative act seeks to provide legal access to Federal National Forest lands to agents of the State, and to allow those agents to thin any areas of the National Forest counties may proclaim as exhibiting "emergency conditions." Without need for amendment or revision, the Forest Plan has guided successful implementation of many wildland-urban interface-thinning projects, especially in areas requested by the Village of Cloudcroft.

I certify that the Lincoln National Forest Plan as amended is sufficient to guide management of the Forest over the next year. Needs for change as identified in this document are necessary over time to maintain the viability of the Plan.

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JOSE M. MARTINEZ Date
Forest Supervisor

Chapter 1 – Setting the Context

Human Dimension - A number of trends are occurring in the Southwest that effect Forest Plan direction, goals, and objectives. Demographics are shifting to an older-aged population, and there will be a continual increase of people of all ages coming here from outside the area. This trend includes an overall transition from a public which desires emphasis on commodity-oriented products and services, to a public that wants programs and program delivery to be amenity-oriented. Results of this shift will include an increase in the kind and number of recreational opportunities, accessibility to all publics, and an ever-increasing sensitivity to macro- and micro-environmental issues.

Although Plan implementation has been flexible in meeting many of society's changing needs, an increase in administrative appeals and litigation demonstrates that Plan direction can be improved to guide resolution of many of these issues. Plan Revision will assess this situation, and these issues can be addressed at that time.

Specific human dimension program areas needing future analysis and possible modification at Plan Revision are:

- Transportation system and Roads Analysis
  - What roads and trails will be available for public use or additional resource needs?
  - What uses will be allowed and are we considering all uses to protect resources?
  - What rights-of-way are needed?
- Public land use, land exchanges, and special uses
- Allowable Sale Quantity of wood products
- Economic availability of small-diameter wood products
- Recreation opportunities
  - Are developed recreation sites adequate in kind and number?
  - Are the variety and number of dispersed recreation opportunities adequate?
  - What are existing and future maintenance obligations?
- Heritage resource management
  - What National Register sites established since 1986 need to be incorporated?
  - What standards and guidelines developed since 1986 need to be incorporated as appropriate?
- Elk and livestock competition for forage
- Water yield, water quality, and water use

Physical/Biological Dimensions - The evolution toward an ecosystem management approach has refocused the Lincoln's sensitivity to ecological issues at the landscape level. Coupled with human dimension trends, this situation has brought needed Plan modifications to the forefront. Foundation concepts upon which Plan Revision will be built include: 1) an increase in the number of listed threatened and endangered plants and animals, 2) an increase in knowledge of the function, processes, and interrelationship of ecosystems, and 3) a recognition that thresholds exist beyond which those ecosystems may no longer be sustainable.

Specific Plan modifications to be considered during Plan Revision are:

- Watershed
  - Ecological objectives need to be strengthened.
  - Existing and desired conditions of riparian habitats need clarification.
  - Standards and guidelines need to be clear and achievable.
- Fire
  - Natural fire needs to be brought back into appropriate ecosystems.
  - Wildland-urban interface needs to be emphasized.
- Range and Wildlife
  - Wild ungulate and livestock management needs to be re-assessed.
- Noxious weeds
  - Accomplishments need to be incorporated.
- Forest health
  - Areas with more urgent resource needs should be identified.
  - Baseline forest health conditions need to be clearly described.
  - Tools to address resource needs should be strengthened.
- TE&S plants and animals
  - Evaluate trade-offs of single-species management in the context of a whole ecosystem.
  - Keeping plants and animals from becoming threatened or endangered needs to continue.

Chapter 2 –Monitoring Results

Introduction

This section is a continuation from prior year monitoring reports, and includes past and present monitoring activities. The Lincoln National Forest monitoring and evaluation program has two components: a) informal monitoring that is documented on Forest worksheets, b) formal monitoring and evaluation through monitoring plans developed at the project or program level.

Informal Monitoring

The Forest conducts informal monitoring during field visits. Monitoring which deals with administration and operational activities, baseline inventories, implementation, effectiveness, and validation monitoring is sometimes documented on Forest monitoring worksheets. Below is a summary of the worksheets over the past several years.

Number of Monitoring Activities by Type, by Year

YEAR	BASELINE	IMPLEMENTATION	EFFECTIVENESS	VALIDATION	TOTAL
1993	14	45	33	0	**92**
1994	16	28	55	0	**99**
1995	27	58	34	5	**124**
1996	44	65	49	2	**160**
1997	30	85	19	5	**139**
1998	52	128	135	2	**317**
1999	3	145	36	3	**187**
2000	15	94	36	5	**150**

Formal Monitoring

Scott Able and Cree Fires

In 2000 the Forest experienced two major wildfires, the Scott Able and Cree Fires. Effectiveness monitoring was done after the installation of barriers to slow erosion. Approximately 3,200 acres were examined to collect baseline vegetation information for Wildland Urban Interface analyses. Photo points were established and additional burned-area restoration monitoring is planned. Additional monitoring points were established within the Cree Fire area to evaluate structures, flow rates, and seeding success. The monitoring will be conducted over a 5-year period and will cover approximately 6,500 acres.

Sacramento River Road

Reconstruction of the Sacramento River Road began in February 2001. This project will provide improved and safer access to and from the Forest. Baseline information collected along the project during 1998 and 1999 included but was not limited to: streams, watershed, wildlife, TE&S and heritage resource sites. Using baseline monitoring information, biologists will continue to inventory and monitor for Mexican spotted owl. The area is monitored annually to help ensure owls do not move within ¼ mile of the construction area. If an owl moves into the area, construction activities will be re-evaluated. The results will help us determine how to work around the breeding season. Approximately nine MSO PACS were monitored within the project area. Two goshawk sites were monitored. Bat habitat monitoring was accomplished on approximately 13 miles of 300-foot corridors to verify our assumptions about bat habitat.

Chapter 3 -- Evaluation

What was Learned

Monitoring of Forest Service boundaries has shown an increase in encroachment onto National Forest land.

District personnel including law enforcement monitor dispersed recreation. Findings include roads being developed and increased impact including litter and vandalism. Monitoring of old railroad grades identified increased vandalism along the Salado Canyon Trestle.

Noxious weed treatments in 1996-1999 were monitored, and we found kill success ranged from 60 – 90%. Where herbicides were applied, post-spraying water samples showed no evidence of water contamination.

Through effectiveness monitoring we have found that fencing within recreational areas such as the Sitting Bull Falls Recreation Area is allowing vegetation to return to its natural state. Although there continues to be some violations, vegetation re-growth is apparent and the fencing is being effective.

Recreation area hosts have proven to be effective, especially in remote areas such as the Sitting Bull Falls Area and Three Rivers Campground. Vandalism is practically non-existent when the host is present.

Of the 15 significantly listed caves monitored, three received illegal entries or at least had trash deposited in them.

The Mexican Spotted Owl Basin and Range East Working Group concluded that the Lincoln's prescriptions for "target" stands within Mexican spotted owl habitat could increase the number of trees harvested. Our prescriptions will be adjusted in these target areas, and new thresholds will be developed. The Guadalupe Ranger District reported finding Mexican spotted owl (MSO) in areas that did not match the MSO habitat criteria. We are finding that neotropical birds (Forest Service sensitive species) are occupying different areas than they have in the past. According to historical records from about 1880 through 1990, birds were found and identified as requiring openness to survive. Although the openness still exists in some areas, most of the birds are absent or extremely rare. One possible answer is that increased pinon and juniper trees have increased the canopy density. Also found were Southwestern willow flycatcher migration activities but no nesting activities.

The New Mexico Rails to Trails Association has been active in the Cloudcroft area for seven years. In addition to monitoring trail conditions, they help maintain, clean, patrol, and build structures to address damage by hikers.

Monitoring of road obliteration techniques shows piling of limbs is working in some areas and not in others. Through monitoring and evaluation, approximately 90% of our road obliteration efforts are considered effective.

Scientific and Technical Assistance

Richard Holland, a local butterfly expert, assisted in the butterfly monitoring. Holland and the Sacramento Ranger District resumed checkerspot surveys in 1997 (Cloudcroft Checkerspot Butterfly, 1998 Survey Summary). Before 1997, the majority of the documented checkerspot habitat was in the immediate area of Pines Campground. The 1997 surveys expanded the known range of the checkerspot butterfly. They were not only found in Pines Campground but also in grassy areas along State Highway 82 from Cloudcroft to the Ski Cloudcroft Area. The checkerspot's known range was expanded as the result of 1998, 1999, and 2000 surveys conducted by the Lincoln National Forest (Cloudcroft Checkerspot Butterfly, 2000 Survey

Summary). The known range expanded 2.5 miles north of Pines Campground, along the Mescalero Reservation boundary. The southern-most point was expanded to 2.7 miles south of Pines Campground, just north of Pierce Canyon on Highway 130. The western-most area was expanded 1.7 miles from Pines Campground to Deerhead Canyon below Deerhead Campground. The eastern-most point was expanded five miles east of Pines Campground to Spud Patch Canyon and to the Reservation.

Effective Public Service
High Rolls Cave is monitored annually in cooperation with the State of New Mexico. Monitoring efforts resulted in the State doing some protective maintenance at the site.

On-going cave surveys include both species surveys and public access/use. Monitoring of the cave resource is done to assure caves are protected from vandalism and over-use. Of the 108 listed significant caves on the Guadalupe Ranger District, 15 were monitored during FY2000. The National Speleological Society (NSS) provides over $100,000 in volunteer work in caves, doing monitoring, cleanup, trail delineation and public education to prevent damage to the Forest cave system.

The NM State Salamander Working Group assisted in Sacramento Mountain salamander monitoring. Monitoring was accomplished with the help of other volunteers, who contributed around $90,000 worth of time and work during the year.

A volunteer that contributed over 60 hours to the monitoring program conducted about 300 acres of threatened and endangered plant surveys. The Student Conservation Association conducted monitoring and evaluation of the Mexican spotted owl, goshawk, salamander and old growth.

The Fee Demo Program allows the Forest Service to charge a minimal fee for the use of a recreation area. The money is then used to maintain the area. Areas managed under the fee demo program continue to show improvements and maintenance at a better rate than non-fee demo areas. The public comment cards are reflecting public approval of the program.

Christmas tree cutting was changed in 1999 to include all Forest Service land except wilderness. The response from the public has remained positive. The Forest continues to see an increase in sales.